

THE ROIDT FAMILY HISTORY

Bohemia

Some time in the middle 1700's, **Andreas Roit** married Susana. We know of two children, Jan (Johann), and Anna. Lucille Roidt Ritzman has the same birthday as Jan, who was born December 4, 1760, at # 15 Klicov, a small village in the western portion of Czechoslovakia, near the German border. In that country, all houses are designated by a numbering system without a street address, generally beginning in the square, and moving in no logical fashion outward. This means that Jan was born in house #15 in the village of Klicov (pronounced Klichov). He was baptized on the date of his birth at The Birth of Our Lady Catholic church in Domazlice, as the village of Klicov was attached to the Domazlice parish before 1784. Because of the high death rate of infants, it was a tradition for the baby's father and the godparents to take the infant to church for baptism on the day of its birth. The basement of the church dates back to 1200. This church was founded in the 12th century and was built in the Romanesque style. In the 15th century it was rebuilt to the Gothic style. In the 18th century, it was rebuilt after a fire, in the Baroque style.

Novy Klicov is a very small village nestled into the hillside, with a dozen or so houses snuggled side by side. Each house, garage, and barn are neatly packaged and separated from its neighbor by a double hung gate, yellow, green, or white. Descendents of Andreas Roit continue to live in #10 Novy Klicov.

After 1784, the family attended church in Mrakov, three kilometers from Novy Klicov (also Neo-Klicov; Neo is German for new and Novy is Czech for new). Today, as in years past, the women wear the traditional costume, heads covered with babushkas, legs clad in red tights or knee socks, pleated skirt covered with a large white apron, balero-type jackets buttoned up the front, sleeves puffed. The church is small, with hard wooden kneelers. Seats for perhaps 80 are in the main body of the church, with the remaining congregation left to stand in the back, or climb the staircase to the balcony. The Stations of the Cross are in ancient pictures on the wall.

Anna's birth date is not known, but it would have been about two years after Jan. Both Jan and Anna married on the same day in a double ceremony with the same witnesses, on February 14, 1789, Jan at the age of 24, and Anna, 22. **Jan** was a farmer and we are descendants from this lineage.

In the late 1700's, Joseph II entrusted the churches to keep records, both civil and religious. Census records did not begin until 1869. In the middle of the 1800's the family name was spelled Roit or Rojt. The "t" or "d" at the end was determined by the priest making the record, based on what he heard the family say. Spelling changes occurred when German was the national language, as names took on the German spelling. Rogt is the ancient spelling, with "g" being pronounced "yuh". Adding "a" on the end of a name was a local variation. In Czechoslovakia, stress is always on the first

syllable. Roidt is the Americanization of the Bohemian name Rojt. Rojtova is used when referring to a female of the family Rojt. Roidt is found spelled as Rojt, Royda, Roit, Rojdt.

Land ownership is a complex process in Czechoslovakia. When a man determines he no longer wants to continue to farm, it is decided who will inherit the farm. It might be the oldest, but also might be the youngest son. The value of the farm is determined and the heir is expected to pay each sibling (the total value divided by the number of siblings) over time. A complex land contract is then drawn up, which identifies the estimate of the value, how the siblings will be paid, the rights of the retired generation, including how much grain, milk, pigs, etc. will be provided to them annually.

A whole plot land owning farmer was considered a rich farmer, owning 20 hectares, or about 40 acres. If it was subdivided between two sons, they each became half plot land owning farmers. A quarter plot land owning farmer was considered a field cottager, which indicated he owned a cottage and 5 acres. A cottager was a social category, which indicated they had nothing but a cottage. These people provided for their family often by a craft, such as weaving, or they became a farm hand. A subtenant was very poor, not owning any land or cottage, and lived in stables and worked as farm hands. In America, the Homestead Act resulted in homes located throughout the fields. In Czechoslovakia, homes are always centrally located in villages with no homes in the rural farming areas. 80% of people in the 1800's were farmers.

Jan married Maria Sokol the same day his sister Anna married Mathaus Sokol. The record of these marriages is recorded in German. They had 9 children, born at # 15 Klicov between 1789 and 1819. Three children were named Martin, the first two apparently dying in infancy. Three children were named Anna, again, the first two apparently dying in infancy. We are descended from their son, **Jakub**, born October 26, 1791 at #10 Novy Klicov. He married Maria Ledvina, born October 17, 1802, on November 23, 1819. He died February 18, 1843, at the age of 52. Maria died April 11, 1884, at the age of 81.

Jakub and Maria had five children: Matthias, a wheeler; Jakob, a farmer; Martin, who died at one year of convulsions; **Martin**, a farmer; Josef; and Anna. We are descended from Martin. Matthias, Jacob and Anna all married on the same day, September 19, 1848. Three of Jakub and Maria's children, Matthias, Martin, and Josef came to America between the years of 1855 and 1870; Matthias apparently in 1864, and Martin in 1867. Jakob remained in Czechoslovakia. Anna died there at the age of 24.

Jakob's descendants continue to live in the small town of Novy Klicov. They regularly feast on roast pork, dumplings and sauerkraut, or schnitzel with potato salad and homemade kolachke. In their paternalistic tradition, the women and children often remain in the kitchen during the time the men are served.

Jan's sister, Anna married at the age of fifteen. She had one child, Anna, who died at one year of age. Anna died at the age of 24 of pneumonia.

The landscape in western Czechoslovakia is much like it is in Wisconsin. They plant yellow rape, which, when ripe, holds dark oily ripened berries from which vegetable oil is made. The narrow road follows a bizarre maze of curves, made only where one farmer's land ends and another's begins, because that is the only land each farmer will begrudgingly give up for this purpose. Their one automobile export is the Skoda (schkoda).

Brief history of the Czech people

The Czechs originated in Western Asia and Eastern Europe. As the tribes of Slavs moved westward, this group migrated to the central part of Europe, and established their homeland within boundaries of what is called Czechoslovakia.

Christianity was brought to the Bohemians by Saints Cyril and Methodius, who first came to Moravia in 869. The new religion flourished after King Borivoj and Queen Ludmilla were baptized by the "Apostles of the Slavs". Later the land was stained by the blood of its people in the clashes, which occurred between the Pagan and Christian. The murder at the door of the church in 929 of Wenceslaus, grandson of the first Christian king, was the turning point in Czech history, because it resulted in the conversion of many and thus made Catholicism the predominant religion of the people.

Thus Christianity progressed over 600 years until heretics such as Juhn Hus tore at the hearts of the Czechs, precipitated the "Thirty Years War", caused the loss of two-thirds of the population, and in the end, led to the subjugation of a freedom-loving people to the despotic rulership of the Austrian Government.

More recently, the blow of communism, which rocked the nation, was a further attempt to knock out the faith of the Czechs, which glowed so brightly for over one thousand years.

Serfdom was the common mode of life after the "Thirty Years War" (1618). Each landlord governed his own subjects. Land ownership by the individual, except for garden-size, was impossible. The taxes were high, and any display of patriotism was regarded as high treason. The great change came in 1848, when the liberation was effected by Monsignor George Bara. Whether this change ameliorated conditions is difficult to ascertain. Although the spirit of freedom prevailed, working conditions remained practically the same; no land could be procured, there was little money, and military obligations had to be satisfied not in the service of the army of the landlord, but in the army of the king. These and other conditions were the causes, which led to the exodus of many Czechs from their country to the new world.

Augustine Herman, the first Czech to come to the new world in 1633, settled in Virginia. To him is given credit of drawing up the first map of Maryland. In 1848, the first large group of immigrants sailed to America, stopped at New Orleans, La., continued up the Mississippi river and landed at St. Louis, Mo. From there they spread to the states

of Kansas, Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. This migratory trend is the reason why such large groups of Bohemians settled, and are still to be found, in the mid-western states. It is also one of the reasons why we find the Bohemians in the township of Franklin.

Emigration

The first immigration from Bohemia to the United States took place after the Revolution in 1848 in Austria and the cause was almost entirely political dissatisfaction. Emigration was generally through Hamburg or Bremen. An individual would request a birth certificate from their local parish, and they were provided with a passport. It took approximately six weeks to travel to America. From their point of entry, immigrants traveled by train to Chicago, and then on to Manitowoc by stagecoach or ship. A hotel, for foreigners, was founded by Bohemians, north of Manitowoc. The first settlers in the Township of Franklin were the Irish in 1855. In 1855-1856, perhaps some 50 families of Bohemian settlers established themselves in the eastern part of the present Town of Franklin.

The first Bohemians settling in Kewaunee County came from Domazlice, located on the Western border of Bohemia, as did our family. The inducement offered was opportunity given for obtaining cheap but good farmland. The succeeding immigration came directly from Bohemia by solicitation of their friends and relatives already settled here, and almost without exception, their reason was a desire to better their material condition. Most bought lands immediately, usually with borrowed money and at once settled upon them while others worked in the large sawmills in Kewaunee for a part of the year and upon their lands during the remainder.

Very little personal property was brought along except the ancestral feather bed. Each family was usually provided with some money, though a lack of funds was not generally a cause of distress because, while clearing his newly purchased farm, the settler was sure of supplies from the timber cut. The greatest difficulties encountered were due to the distance of the market and the lack of roads. During the first years, Manitowoc was 30 miles to the nearest market, and roads were corduroys through swamplands. When the village of Kewaunee was settled, conditions improved.

In fall, supplies were laid in for winter and if even flour gave out, hand coffee mills were used to grind whatever wheat they had.

The Township was organized by John Franks in 1857, and was called Franksville. Later, it was called by the name of Stangelville. The name of St. Lawrence was chosen for their church, in memory of the church, which these people left behind in Mrakov, Bohemia. Although a priest was not present, except on occasion, it was to this church that these people trekked Sunday after Sunday, some for miles on foot, by horse, wagon, and oxen, to worship their God, to seek solace, strength and inspiration in the face of dire poverty and taxing sacrifices, and to pray for their loved ones with whom they parted scarcely a decade before.

Sacrifice was an accepted way of life for these pioneers, when hemlock bark was peeled and hauled by horse-drawn wagon to a tannery twenty-five miles away, and when hand-made shingles were the only cash crops. "Many people years ago would walk barefooted for five or six miles, and put on their shoes at the outskirts of town to go to church", stated Mrs. Joseph (Margaret) Cherney, aunt to Lawrence Roidt.

Father Joseph Maly, the first Missionary to come to this territory, recounted that the customary mode of transportation was on foot, by following the Indian paths through the forests, while carrying a heavy suit case which contained the vestments for the Mass, an altar stone, candles, missal, and other items necessary to carry out his priestly duties. The people were poor, and the only means of livelihood was the making of wooden shingles by hand. They carried their wares to the nearest town, sometimes twenty miles away, traded the shingles, and returned with a sack of flour on their backs. When it rained the flour was ruined. At such times they, including the missionary, subsisted from the animals and herbs from the woods, and the fish from the streams. The home was made of logs fastened together in whatever way possible. The table was a stump, covered with boards made of split logs. In one corner of the home was a place for a bed, and in another corner a place for the children.

The history of the village of Franklin is somewhat clouded as to the exact date of its origin, due to a fire which destroyed the early records of the Township. This much, however, is known: that Mathias Roidt arrived in the Township of Franklin in 1864; that he purchased the land presently occupied by the Vi Konop Hotel in 1865, and built there the first store and tavern sometime between 1865 and 1868. A shoe repair shop was added in 1868 and a hardware store soon after. Thus the Village of Franklin was born.

A score of years passed before the Village of Franklin became Stangelville. John Stangel settled in Tisch Mills in 1853, and with his sons, migrated from Tisch Mills and bought the Store and Tavern once owned by Mathias Roidt. When the post office was established on March 3, 1890, the Stangel Brothers renamed the Village, and called it Stangelville.

Mathias was probably the first Roidt to arrive in America. He is listed in the St. Lawrence, Stangelville, Wisconsin Centennial book as an early settler. He died at the age of 55 on March 8, 1877 and is buried at St. Lawrence cemetery. His wife, Anna (Skornicka) was left with two children, Anna and Thomas.

Josef was born June 1, 1837 and died October 5, 1908 at the age of 71 of general decline in Kewaunee County, Wisconsin. He is buried in Tisch Mills Cemetery. One child is known, Anastasia, born February 13, 1867 in Stangelville.

Martin was born February 5, 1830 in Novy Klicov, Domazlice, Czechoslovakia. He was a farmer. He married Margaret Kabourek, born May 22, 1839 in a nearby village, Stanetice (pronounced Stun ya Teetsa). Because of the difficulty obtaining land, coming to America and being able to obtain land was very desirable. Martin, age 37, and

Margaret, called Maggie, age 29, came to America on May 23, 1867, with four children: Maria, age 6, Jacob, age 4, Anna, age 2, and Johann, age $\frac{3}{4}$. They left from Bremen, Germany and arrived in New York on the *Helmut Simonis*, which had a tonnage of 400 tons.

Their children, except for Johann, are named in the 1870 census. There is no death record found for him, but a subsequent child was named John in 1869. Perhaps he died during the voyage. In all, Martin and Margaret had 10 children, the five mentioned above, plus Adam, Margaret, **Lawrence**, Peter, and Josephine. Peter is listed on the 1880 census, but no birth or death record has been found. We are descended from Lawrence.

In the 1912 Atlas of Kewaunee County, shows Lawrence owned land in Section 3. This would be Martin's original property. Property listed in records dating June 1, 1870, showed Martin Roidt had improved the land, owned wood land, had one milk cow, two working oxen, one other cattle, and two swine. He had 50 bushels of spring wheat, 20 bushels of rye, 12 bushels of oats, and 10 bushels of barley. The cash value of the farm is listed at \$300 and cash value of implements is listed at \$40. The original cabin stood to the left of the existing house as you faced it. Marie Roidt remembers the existing house being built, and is thought to have been in about 1906. It was said to be built of reclaimed lumber. Subsequently, a pump house for milk processing was added, as well as a shed, a granary, and a barn. Martin died at the age of 69, on May 9, 1899 in Stangelville. The cause of his death was dropsy, or congestive heart failure. He had been ill for one week. After his death, Margaret lived with her son Lawrence on the family farm.

Cele and Betty stated their Grandma was a nice, quiet lady who could read and write, but spoke no English. They remember her mending and rocking in her rocker. Cele would have to thread her needle so she could do the mending, because she couldn't see well. After Martin died, a cabin was built for her in the place where the garage now stands. It had a window on the east side and the door had a window. It had a wood-burning stove, which was called a "pig" which she used to keep the cabin warm, and was also used for baking. They would put potatoes in the coals. She made soup from the blood when geese were butchered. There was a bench between the cabinet and the stove so you could sit on it and keep your feet warm. One of the children stayed with her in her cabin. When she became sickly she was moved to the big house for several weeks, where she died in the front bedroom.

Cele remembers Auntie Cherney saying, while washing clothes on the porch on a washboard, "grandma's feet are swelling up and when the swelling reaches her heart she would be dead". When she died, Uncle Joseph Rebitz and Lawrence carried the body out of the bedroom and took it to the living room. Lawrence got ice in a washtub and put boards over it, and she was placed on a sheet. The body was washed, and there was no casket. The door was shut and candles were lit. Cele remembers the dresser stood in the living room, and she had to get towels from it. "I was scared stiff you know, because she was laying there with that black handkerchief". She was dressed in a black dress and black scarf. Embalming was not a law in those years and she was not buried for 4 days.

She was buried from the home. She died at the age of 85 of general senility, on September 6, 1839 in the Town of Franklin.

Lawrence was born August 17, 1875. His death certificate lists his birth in Bohemia, however, this would not be correct as the family immigrated in 1867. Lawrence married Katherine Rebitz, born July 29, 1875, on October 3, 1899 at St. Lawrence Church, Stangelville. Lawrence and Margaret had eleven children plus a stillborn boy.

Lawrence was not much interested in farming, rather, he enjoyed business. Once when he was shoeing a horse, a piece of steel flew into his eye and they took him to Milwaukee to Marquette Hospital. His eye was so bad when they got him there that the doctor took care of him right away at night. He was a road boss when the highway was built, being responsible for a crew. He was County Treasurer 1904 through 1908, Constable 1926, 1927, and 1928. He always signed his name L.J. Roidt. He could read and write English, and always read the paper. The neighbor had a Bohemian paper. He is remembered by his children as being friendly and easy going, but strict with the children. In the winter when it was very cold, he would hitch up the sleigh and take the whole neighborhood to school. There were no thermometers, but he would walk to the barn and could tell if the children could walk to school or not. He plowed fields with a team of horses, one row at a time.

Lawrence had a stroke three years before his death. Lucille, Cele, and Betty said his mind was "vague" before he died, and he spent his time walking around and sitting on the porch. He couldn't see well, but if you cut his meat he could feed himself. Lucille would walk around the farm with him when she visited. The day he died, Isabelle was ironing clothes. He was sitting on the bed in the first floor bedroom off the kitchen. Isabelle heard a "thud" when he fell over about 8:00 or 9:00 PM. The neighbors came and Jimmy went for the priest. He died about midnight and Betty called Lucille in the morning. She was pregnant at the time, and felt "everything drop". She didn't feel the baby move after that and a stillborn girl was delivered in December. He was laid out at Lyman DeWayne's funeral home in Denmark. It was a shoe maker's shop which had an empty room and Lyman then started a funeral home.

The children attended Wood Lawn Country School, which was through 8th grade. They learned English in the school. Lucille, Betty, and Cele remember there were apple trees, and their mother canned applesauce and made apple jelly, she canned tomatoes and made pickles. She had yeast in blocks and cut off and crumbled it when making bread from wheat flour. Wheat was taken to the mill and traded for ground flour. Just before winter, a pig was butchered and cut up and buried in the snow, or it was fried and packed in crock jars and kept in the cellar. When the pig was butchered, the feet were thrown into the stove so the nails would come off, or they were put in hot water and pulled off with pliers. All parts of the pig were used. The head of the pig was made into head-cheese or sausage, mixing it with bread, onions, and seasonings and put into casing. A cistern in the basement supplied their need for water as it collected rainwater throughout the year. The children remember a big wind up clock in the house.

The children remember making “eagle eye” which was needed to make soap. It was made from ashes collected from the stove and stored in a keg. In spring, rainwater was added. It was collected by draining the water from the keg and what remained was added to fat (melted lard) when making soap. Soap was made once a year and cut into bars.

Lucille remembers that her mother had thick, dark brown hair down to her waist, which she wore on the top of her head. Lucille would brush it while her mother knitted mittens, and sweaters. She taught her children to be good Catholics, to go to church and to receive the sacraments. She was pretty. The girls’ dresses were hand sewn, the fabric having been obtained at a dry good store in Stangelville. They grew poppy seed, potatoes, carrots, and cabbage. The farm had geese, chickens, cows, and workhorses. The children remember the gander would hiss and chase them, trying to attack them. Foods that are remembered are cooked cereal, sandwiches made with lard, chicken, pork, beef, and old fashioned sugar cookies. The lard was rendered from the pigs.

The children and their mother would walk to church. Growing up, Lucille remembers a crank car, and a crank telephone box on the wall. The children played “duck, duck, drown the duck”, tag, jacks, went sledding, and played hide and seek. They played baseball with the neighbor children. Chores included making their beds, cleaning vegetables, hoeing, and washing the floor and washing dishes. Discipline was given by their mother, who hit the palm of their hand while asking, “why did you do that?” or were required to sit in a chair. Lucille remembers being punished for hitting her sister, Isabelle. Water for cooking and washing was heated on the woodburning stove in the kitchen. The children bathed in a washtub in the kitchen by the stove, taking turns, youngest to oldest. The family gathered and prayed before going to bed.

Birthdays were not celebrated, rather, everyone just said, “Happy Birthday”. They always had a Christmas tree, which was decorated with apples and chocolate Santa Clauses. Lawrence played Santa Claus. One Christmas, Lucille remembers the children were to kneel down and pray, and after that Santa would come. She said, “I was nosy, and opened the door too soon and spoiled it all”. Her mother told her she scared Santa away and they wouldn’t get anything. When the older girls went to Milwaukee to work, they would send candy and one year they got red beads, another, a small doll. The children remember their Uncle Jacob, who never married and who lived in Crandon, Wisconsin. They said he was very nice and always brought them rock candy when he came to visit.

A featherbed served as a sick bed when needed. It was placed in the dining room for a sick child, for such illnesses like mumps, measles, and chicken pox.

“The girls all sang in a choir, along with the Paitl’s, the Kralovitz’s, the Renish’s and everyone sang. After church they congregated and had breakfast, Uncle took out the bible and read the lesson. He didn’t go to church but he knew the bible better than anybody. He used to visit in Czechoslovakia and had slides.”

Katherine died on Easter Monday, after gall bladder surgery done the previous Thursday. Cele said she was run down. They visited her Sunday night and stayed most of the night. They went to Wavrunek's for breakfast. When they returned to the hospital, she was dead. She was 51 years old. Cele was the oldest at home, having just turned 19 in May. Betty related, "the neighbor asked, after your mother died, who washed your clothes? Who cooked your supper? We did, we said." Betty then laughed, and said, "I don't know if I did something to Lucille or what, but once she put starch in Aunt Cele's underwear. And we made rye bread once—how hard to get the oven just hot enough".

Lucia Barbara Roidt, was born December 4, 1911 in Stangelville. She was called "schimmel", which means "white horse" by her father because she was so blond. She attended school through 8th grade, graduating at age 14. She attended Kewaunee High School but only went for 2 years and then helped at home. At about age 16, she went to Milwaukee with Betty, and worked at Milwaukee Lutheran Hospital at 22nd and Kilbourn, working in the dining room. She had living quarters at the hospital. She met Clarence Leroy Ritzman, born May 26, 1913, at a dance hall. She married him on February 20, 1936 in Port Washington, WI.

Clarence graduated from Washington High School in Milwaukee and then attended Boys Technical School. He worked with his brother Bill, at a paint store in Des Moines, Iowa. He then worked at Lakeside Power Plant in Milwaukee and later transferred to Port Washington. Clarence and Lucille lived in a house rented from the power plant on East Sunset Road, and built a house before 1939 (land abstract mortgage is dated 5-31-38). Originally, the garage was between a bedroom and the kitchen. This was converted to another bedroom when Lucille was expecting twins. The new house was built in 1948. He was a boiler room helper, a boiler room operator, and then a boiler room engineer. He used every opportunity to learn at the Public Service Company, Wisconsin Electric Power Company. He was exempted from the war. He was a member of the Knights of Pythias. They had six children: Kathleen, Barbara, Bonnie, Clarice, Larry, Richard, and one stillborn girl, who was to have been named Chris.

Lucille had a large garden, growing kohlrabi, beans, beets, cauliflower, tomatoes, carrots, cucumbers, as well as flowers, such as zinnias and hollyhocks. She canned chili sauce, peaches, and tomatoes. They raised chickens and canned the meat. Clarence butchered the chickens, then Lucille plucked the feathers and cleaned them.

Clarence had rheumatic fever, during which he was hospitalized for 6 weeks at St. Alphonsus Hospital. He was diagnosed with chronic lymphocytic leukemia in Madison, WI. He was 5' 10" and weighed 210#. Weight loss was prescribed and he used experimental drugs through Dr. Pshiotto in Milwaukee. He died March 9, 1959, at the age of 45, after having exploratory surgery. When he died, Lucille got \$300 a month in benefits for herself and Larry and Rick. She went to work at St. Alphonsus as a nurse's aide at nights. She then worked at St. Mary's in Milwaukee for 12 years, retiring in 1981.

Cele always stopped to remember when she spoke saying, “what shu callit”. Betty would say, “I don’t mean it wrong”, and an expression often repeated, “alay yea yea”. At the end of one of the taped sessions recorded in 1980, Betty said, “If a person could turn back the years, how differently a person would do things—how we would probably forgive and forget. Yes, but then when you look back now, they are happy memories when you can laugh. It wasn’t funny then though.” Aunt Cele said, “it was a good life”.